**Legislative Report**

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There was little action addressing pensions and “pension reform” during the 102nd General Assembly. The legislature did, however, address pension debt, albeit in a modest way. The budget that passed provides for full payment of the State’s current pension obligation as well as an additional $200 million for prepayment of existing pension debt. SB2803, passed earlier in the session, appropriated $300 million for pension debt prepayment, bringing the total to $500 million. This amount matched what Governor Pritzker had proposed in his budget address delivered in early February. The projected long-term savings to the State (read “taxpayers”) is $1.8 billion. While the pension debt problem remains, the prepayment represents a positive and significant first step towards addressing the “pension crisis”.

In another action, the legislature extended the existing pension buyout “pilot program” an additional two years. The buyout program, which applies to SURS annuitants who have not begun to receive their pension benefits, allows employees upon retirement to receive an immediate cash sum equal to either 60% of their total estimated lifetime pension or 70%, based on a reduced annual increase (1.5% rather than 3%). Both options reduce the expected payout annuitants can expect to receive. Currently employed annuitants should consult with SURS before opting for the buyout program.

It was not surprising in an election year during a shortened session, with primaries coming in June, that there was little mention of “pension reform.” It is possible, but unlikely, that pension issues will arise during the fall “veto session.” SUAA’s Executive Director, Linda Brookhart, thinks that we have a year or two before the General Assembly will seriously consider “doing something” about pensions.

This has not, however, kept those outside of the legislature from continuing to call for a reduction in pension and health care benefits for State employees. For example, the Tribune on May 5th once again editorialized that “genuine pension reform” (meaning a reduction) is one of three key issues that candidates in the upcoming primary needed to address. Although pensions may not now be center stage, they remain only steps away in the wings.

As your legislative liaison, my job is to closely follow the General Assembly’s activities, to be alert for bills affecting pensions and health care benefits, and to monitor policy initiatives put forward by a variety of organizations, such as the Civic Federation and the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability (CTBA). I report to the UIC SUAA Board and, when appropriate, provide the membership with information of interest and concern.

In addition to my position with the UIC SUAA Board, I co-chair the (state) SUAA Legislative Policy Platform Committee along with Leo Welch (Southwestern Illinois College). Each year at the fall SUAA meeting, the House of Delegates approves a Platform for the coming year. Leo and I begin working on a Platform draft following the SUAA Annual Meeting in June and seek input from the SUAA Board, the House of Delegates, and individual chapters and members. The Platform is presented to the House of Delegates at the fall meeting, which this year will be held in early November. Following approval, the Platform becomes the official position of SUAA regarding legislative matters.

As co-chair of the Platform Committee, our chapter has another link to the statewide organization. While not a voting member of the Board of Directors, I attend Board meetings. I also talk regularly with the SUAA Executive Director, who is an indispensable source of information regarding the General Assembly and individual legislators. I encourage you to contact me with your questions, comments, and ideas, so that I can better represent you in my dealings with statewide SUAA.

Finally, although this has been a relatively quiet year regarding some of the items of importance to SUAA, issues have a way of arising with little advance notice. Therefore, I will continue to monitor State legislative matters and report to the UIC SUAA chapter membership as appropriate.